

Looking for the Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Today we are in chapter 17, verses 20 to 37. I encourage you to open your Bibles to Luke chapter 17, verses 20 to 37. We did print it for you today in the worship guide.

We usually do not do that because we want people to bring their Bibles so that they can see the context of the passages that they read. But if you don't have a Bible today, you can use the worship guide that we printed for you.

Before I read and preach, let me pray for God's help. Heavenly Father, we gather once again around your Word because we believe that you speak today through your Word.

Because we believe that you rule us through your Word. Because we believe that in your Word we find life and joy and peace.

Because through it we come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. So we ask once again that you will address us from your Word.

[1 : 1 8] So that instead of being distracted by the currents of this world, that we might be able to maintain our focus and perseverance as we follow after your Son, Jesus Christ.

So that we might live with awareness of and anticipation of the Kingdom of God that will be fulfilled as you promised.

So now help us as we incline our ears to hear. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Luke 17, verses 20 to 37.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, He answered them, The Kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, Look, here it is, or there.

For behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you. And He said to the disciples, The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.

[2 : 2 5] And they will say to you, Look there, or look here. Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in His day.

But first, He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all.

So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop with his goods in the house not come down to take them away.

And likewise, let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

[3 : 40] I tell you, in that night, there will be two in one bed, one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.

And they said to him, Where, Lord? He said to them, Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

According to a poll conducted in 2012 for Reuters, it spanned 20 countries, it said that one in seven people, about 14% of the world's population, believe that the world will end in their lifetime for one reason or another.

And according to the Wikipedia page that lists all the dates that have been predicted for apocalyptic events, there have been no less than 173 end-of-the-world predictions that have already come and gone.

And most recently, Ronald Wineland, a leader of a cult that splintered off from a Christian denomination, predicted that Jesus would return on June 9, 2019. It's two months ago.

[4 : 50] He had previously predicted the world would end in 2011, and 2012, and 2013 as well. Such attempts to predict the end of the world often becomes obsessive and unhealthy.

And this was the case for ancient Jews as well. Many of them were preoccupied with reading astrological science to figure out when the end of the world would come. And they believed that the world, as they know, will come to an end when the Messiah comes, the Christ comes, to establish the kingdom of God.

And so, it's not surprising then that after Jesus performs wondrous signs, such as healing lepers, and announcing the kingdom of God, that they asked Jesus this question at the beginning of our passage.

When will the kingdom of God come? Verse 20. They're asking, if you claim that you are performing the signs of the kingdom, when will this kingdom of God's rule and authority actually come?

And Jesus answered them this way in verses 20 to 21. The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, look, here it is, or there, for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

[5 : 59] There's no way, Jesus is saying, to observe the coming of the kingdom of God by studying the stars or the times. No one can say, look, here it is, or there it is, because the kingdom of God will not be tied to a specific, visible location like the kingdoms of this world.

For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. And with this statement, Jesus is challenging the Pharisees' misunderstanding about the kingdom of God in two ways. First, they believe that the kingdom of God was still to come in the future and not yet here in any real sense.

But Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is already here. It has not been fully consummated yet, that does lie in the future, but it has already come in a real sense with Jesus.

And so he says, it is in the midst of you. And second, the Pharisees believed that the kingdom of God will come with observable signs that we should look for, trying to set a timetable for Christ's return or for the kingdom of God.

But Jesus tells us that there is no need to look around because the kingdom of God is in their very midst. Sometimes this phrase, in the midst of you, gets interpreted to mean that the kingdom of God is within us, in our hearts.

[7 : 15] And in the past, I have thought the same. But the more I think about it, I don't think that's what it means because Jesus is speaking here to the Pharisees who are the last people in the Gospels to whom Jesus will say, the kingdom of God is inside you.

And secondly, Jesus is also, pointing out the fact that the kingdom of God is something that we enter in, something we, by submitting to the lordship of Christ, to the rule of God, it's something we enter into.

The Gospels do not speak, usually, of the kingdom of God entering into us. He never speaks of it that way. And so Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is God's rule, it's His domain, it's wherever Jesus reigns, and it's wherever Christ and His followers are, those who are the subjects of the king, the citizens of the kingdom of God.

That's the kingdom. And Jesus is teaching the Pharisees the reality of that. And after He says that, Jesus then turns around to the very disciples who do belong to the kingdom of God.

And then He says this, in verse 22, The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you will not see it. Even though the kingdom of God has already been started, inaugurated, Jesus speaks of a future day when it will be consummated, when the king will return in full glory and power and authority.

[8 : 38] There is this already here, but not yet fully here, aspect to the kingdom of God. A heavenly colony, so to speak, has been established here on earth.

But the kingdom of God has not exerted its rule over the entirety of this world yet. And so Jesus says the days are coming. It's yet to come.

When you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you will not see it. And the days are coming, it's referring to the future days. And one of the days is kind of an idiomatic way of saying first of the days.

So these disciples, the days are coming when the followers of Christ will long to see the first of the fullness of the kingdom of God. The first day, the initial, the beginnings of the reign of Christ in full power.

That's what they will long to see, but they will not see the Christ return that way. The phrase Son of Man is the most common way that Jesus refers to himself in the Gospels.

[9 : 39] And it's an allusion to Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14. Daniel said this, I saw in night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man.

And he came to the Ancient of Days, that's God, and was presented before him. And to him, the Son of Man, was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away. And his kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. So this is the expectation that's behind this frenzy about the kingdom of God and the Son of Man.

The Son of Man will come with the very authority of God himself to rule. But that time, Jesus says, lies in the future. It's not now. But this won't stop people from looking for him.

It says in verse 23, and they will say to you, look there or look here. Do not go out or follow them. Jesus is warning us false rumors will circulate.

[10 : 48] Timetables will be proposed. But don't be deceived by them. Earlier in Luke chapter 9, verse 23, he uses very similar verbs like this to describe following him, to describe Christian discipleship.

He told them to come after him and to follow him. And Jesus is making a contrast here. In order to be faithful disciples who go after Christ and follow Christ, we cannot be disciples who go out after these rumors and timetables and follow these distractions because they really are distractions from true Christian discipleship.

And Jesus gives us the reason why we should not be duped by these speculations in verse 24. For, as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.

If a lightning were to strike right now, no one's going to look around and wonder to themselves, did a lightning just strike? Because we're all going to know that lightning just struck because it's obvious.

It comes with the crack of deafening thunder. It lights up the sky from one end to the other. It's visible. It's obvious. It's plain to everybody. And the return of Christ, the coming of the Son of Man and his full authority will be the same.

[12 : 07] There will be nothing to mistake about it. So there's no need to speculate or go searching for him because as one Bible scholar Alfred Plummer sums it up, none will foresee it and all will see it at once.

But there is something that must happen before the Son of Man returns in glory. Jesus says in verse 25, The Son of Man's return in all power, glory, and authority will first be preceded by his suffering and rejection at the hands of men.

In Luke, as in the other Synoptic Gospels, Jesus repeatedly predicts that he will suffer and die. But this is the only place of all the Gospels where Jesus connects his suffering with his glorious return in the future.

And that juxtaposition is jarring. That glorious Son of Man that Daniel 7 talks about, he will first suffer and be rejected. That Son of Man who will light up the sky and have all dominion over all kingdoms, over all peoples and nations, who will judge the world and bring justice, that Son of Man will first suffer and be rejected by this generation.

Jesus' reign in glory and power comes through the path of humility and suffering and that's instructive for us as people who seek to follow him in his footsteps.

[13 : 38] Sometimes Christians who emphasize the end times have this triumphalist attitude. We will conquer the world for Christ. We will win this nation back through our activism.

We will grow ever more influential and powerful and prepare the world for Christ's return. We have all heard these slogans or rallying cries. But Jesus teaches us here that the glory, authority, and power await only those who go through suffering and rejection and humility.

Jesus says later to his disciples in Luke chapter 21, people will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This will be your opportunity to bear witness. The church that is not prepared for suffering is a church that is sure to decline because God intends for us to bear witness to this world in the context of suffering and rejection.

We should expect rejection when we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people. We should expect various forms of suffering and persecution in this life.

[14 : 55] To follow Christ is to submit to his lordship and to give up our selfish desires. To follow Christ is to consider others better than ourselves, to look out for their interests not merely our own.

To follow Christ is to stand firmly on his word in a world that rejects God's word. All of these things necessarily lead to suffering.

So have you accepted this reality? Are you prepared to suffer for Christ? Nobody ever said that following Christ will be free of hardship.

But is following Christ better? Is following Christ sweeter? Is following Christ to experience his comfort and guidance every step of the way?

Absolutely. Because in suffering with Christ we have fellowship with him. He is with us and he is worth forsaking the entire world for. And because of this we can endure.

[15 : 59] Looking forward to the fact that the suffering in this life is not the end. It's not the final word. There will be glory that comes. There will be redemption, vindication that comes when Christ returns.

Whether we die before he comes and go to him or whether we remain alive for his return we will see him face to face. And when we see him face to face the demons that we have been fighting both literal and figurative will be subdued underneath our feet.

The world that had hated Christ and had persecuted his people will be repaid. the sins that had plagued us in this life that we had fought so long against will be behind us forever and all of our sorrows will be washed away and he will wipe away our tears and we will get to behold Christ's gracious and loving face the face of our Savior the one whom we today dream about and fight for and long for and persevere for.

it's only by remembering this by living with awareness of and anticipation for the kingdom of God that we can persevere to the end and be faithful to Christ in the midst of our sufferings.

And so Jesus continues this teaching in verses 26 to 30 verse 26 just as it was in the days of Noah so will it be in the days of the Son of Man they were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all likewise just as it was in the days of Lot they were eating and drinking and buying and selling and planting and building but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

[17 : 53] Jesus compares the time leading up to the return of Christ, His return in power. He compares that to the times of Noah and Lot. During the times of Noah and Lot, the people of that age were characterized by really unprecedented wickedness, desperate wickedness.

And that's why they received such severe judgment. In Noah's time, by a flood that drowned them all during Lot's time, fired himself a kind of volcanic-like punishment raining from heaven.

And only Noah and Lot and their families escaped these judgments. And they alone were prepared for God's judgment. And Jesus warns about that in the same way. And note the comparison that Jesus is making. It's very interesting.

Because even though the times of Noah and Lot were characterized by great wickedness, Jesus makes nothing of how wicked they were. And Jesus is not trying to say here that His generation and the people that will be there at the time of Christ's return will be extraordinarily wicked.

He doesn't say that. The only comparison He's making here is not of their depravity, but of their unawareness. Of the fact that they will be unsuspecting when Christ returns.

[19 : 11] They will be immersed in their normal, harmless, day-to-day activities. Like eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building.

And that's precisely the point. People will be going about their business as usual when the Son of Man returns in full glory and power.

They will be completely oblivious to the fact that their eternal fate hangs in the balance. Jesus made a similar point earlier in Luke chapter 14 where people in a parable refused the invitation to God's heavenly banquet because of their preoccupation with their property, their family and their jobs.

These are necessary preoccupations of life. There's nothing inherently sinful about them. But even these harmless occupations, these concerns, they're not valid reasons for neglecting to pursue Jesus Christ.

And if they become the reason why we do not pursue Jesus Christ, then they will become fatal reasons. They will become the reasons that damn us for eternity.

[20 : 24] This is an important point for us to recognize. I firmly believe that if you look at the spiritual obituary of the people that are in hell at the end of the days, many of them will have very ordinary sentences.

Not that they committed heinous crimes, but that they were given to day-to-day preoccupations so that they were blind to Christ's message. That they didn't believe in Jesus.

You can be unprepared for the return of Christ because you're consumed with being a serial adulterer. But you can also be unprepared because you're simply trying to be a devoted spouse and a family man.

You can be unprepared for the return of Christ because you're a hedonist running headlong after all these illicit pleasures of life. But you can also be unprepared because you're simply distracted with working and earning money and buying and eating food.

Christian writer C.S. Lewis illustrates this idea in a very imaginative way in his books, *The Screwtape Letters*. *The Screwtape Letters* is a series of dialogues between two demons.

[21 : 39] One is named Screwtape. He's kind of the senior devil. And he is advising kind of, I guess, an intern or whatever, Wormwood.

And he advises him, interestingly, to involve his patient, his human subject, in ordinary kind of small sins. And he writes it this way.

You will say that these are very small sins. And doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the enemy.

That's God. It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing.

Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

[22 : 48] Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Even things that are harmless in and of themselves, such as eating, drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, and marrying and being given in marriage.

If they prevent us from being followers of Christ. If they lead us away from Christ, they'll lead us unawares down the path to hell. And that's why Jesus is warning his disciples sternly here.

Don't be caught unprepared when the Son of Man returns to render his final judgment. Be expectant. Live with awareness of and anticipation for the kingdom of God.

And if we live with such awareness and anticipation for Christ's return, we will not be encumbered by the things of this world. And that's what Jesus emphasizes in verses 31 to 32.

On that day, let the one who is on the housetop with the goods in the house not come down to take them away. And likewise, let the one who is in the field not turn back.

[23 : 46] Remember Lot's wife. If you have ever done a fire drill at school, you are familiar with these instructions. First, stop whatever you are doing immediately.

Second, do not gather your belongings. Leave everything behind. And third, head straight to the emergency exit. You guys have all heard these instructions.

As a child, I always wondered why my teachers told me not to gather my belongings. If there's a fire, I don't want my stuff to burn. Why should I leave them behind? Of course, the rationale is that seconds can be the difference between life and death as a fire spreads.

And the moments spent gathering your belongings can be your very undoing. And trying to carry, lug those luggages along with you can prevent you from a speedy exit.

And it can in fact block other people from exiting as well. Jesus is getting at the same idea. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop with his goods in the house not come down to take them away.

[24 : 50] And likewise, let the one who is in the field not turn back. When Jesus returns, there will be no time to go back and gather our belongings. When Jesus returns, there will be no second chances, no time to change our mind.

We will have to leave all of our earthly possessions and preoccupations behind us. And so Jesus warns us, remember Lot's wife. In Genesis 19, when God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah because of their exceeding wickedness, Lot's family alone is rescued because they're warned beforehand.

And as the family is escaping, Lot's wife, it says, looked back at Sodom that was being destroyed. And she became a pillar of salt as punishment.

Lot's wife could not leave the life she knew behind. She looked back with regret and longing and was punished as a result and became a pillar of salt.

19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon says this about Lot's wife, that she was, quote, almost saved, but not quiet. How tragic is that verdict?

[26 : 01] What are your worldly attachments? What are you trying to salvage from this world? The paycheck you worked hard for?

The spouse or family you always wanted? The house you had dreamed of? The retirement you saved for? Are these things keeping you from following Christ?

Will they say of you when you die, almost saved, but not quiet? Jesus continues in verse 33, Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

Whoever clings to his own life and tries to maintain his autonomy and rebellion against God, instead of surrendering his or her life to God, will actually end up losing his life.

But whoever forsakes his own life for the sake of following Christ will end up saving it. So let me ask you, what good is grabbing your laptop only to be consumed by the fire?

[27 : 04] What good is having all the respect and power you could accumulate in this world? What good is being beautiful and desirable and famous? What good is a billion dollars?

If after all, at the end of your days, you perish eternally apart from Christ? Only those who lose their lives in order to live for Christ will find eternal life.

Only those who have a healthy disinterest in the things of this world will actually live in a way that gives evidence of interest in the kingdom of heaven.

So I tell you, Jesus says in verses 34 to 35, Just to clarify, this is not speaking about the popular concept of rapture.

I don't know if some of you guys have heard of that. It's the idea that all believers will instantaneously be transported from earth to heaven before Christ's return, or depending on how you view it, that could vary.

[28 : 18] But that idea of a rapture is not actually a biblical idea. It was popularized by the fictional series Left Behind. I don't know if you've read it. It's entertaining, but it's fiction.

That idea of a rapture that you may be familiar with was invented by a man named John Nelson Darby in the 19th century. It has no historical basis in church history.

It has no scriptural basis in God's word. It's based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15, verse 52. The only kind of rapture that the Bible speaks of is in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 17, where it says that those who are alive at the time of Christ's return, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so will always be with the Lord.

That's the only kind of rapture that the Bible speaks of. And there, the word to meet the Lord in the air is not speaking of departing and being transported away from earth. It's actually the word that is used when you go out of your house to greet a guest that's coming so that you could usher them in into your house.

So the going up to meet the Lord in the air is you meet Him in heaven, in the air, so you can come down with Him to be a part of His rule and reign in the new heavens and the new earth.

[29 : 34] So it's not talking about rapture that you're disappearing. So that's not in view here at all in verses 34 to 35. What I think is in view here is instead at the final judgment, there will be a clear separation between those who belong to Christ and those who do not.

By all outward appearances, humanly speaking, they will be indistinguishable, but they will be distinguished by their allegiance to Christ. They could be roommates or siblings or husband and wife sharing one bed in a room, sleeping at night, but one will be taken and the other left.

They could be next door neighbors or co-workers grinding at the mill together, the ones you share your desk with, the ones that you are in the same project with, but one will be taken and the other left.

That's why the urgency to share the gospel is ever present with us. And even though Jesus already taught His disciples in verses 23 to 24 that there's no reason to look for this and search for His return, it will be as plain and visible to all like a lightning that lights up the sky, disciples can't help but to still ask at the end here in verse 37, where, Lord?

Where will all these things take place? Where will the Son of Man descend? Where will the separation of the righteous and the wicked take place? And Jesus reiterates His earlier point by quoting a proverb.

[31 : 02] Where the course is, there the vultures will gather. Jesus uses the same proverb in Matthew 24, 28, and there, and likely here as well, I think Jesus is just using that to make a general point.

It's similar to the English proverb that we're familiar with, where there's smoke, there's fire. If you see smoke, that's evidence that there's fire somewhere.

In the same way, wherever the vultures are gathered, you can be sure that there is a corpse. So the presence of vultures invariably indicate that there's a corpse.

In a similar way, when you observe these things that Jesus speaks of, when the judgment is taking place, there will be no mistaking it. There will be no missing it. It will be obvious when it happens.

Jesus will certainly return to judge the world, and He will appear when people are least expecting Him. And when He comes, there will be no opportunity to change our minds last minute.

[32 : 02] His judgment will be final, and that's why we as God's people must live with awareness of and anticipation for the Kingdom of God. But I want to ask you, if you are all prepared for His coming, some of you have not yet put your faith in Jesus Christ, how then can you prepare for this fearful judgment?

How can you escape God's judgment? Jesus hinted at this earlier in verse 25 when He said, But first, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Jesus is on His way right now to Jerusalem to die on the cross for the sins of those who put their faith in Him. And He does it for our sake.

Jesus is the loyal Son of God who alone does not deserve to be punished. None of us deserve to escape the flood judgment that befell Noah's population. None of us deserves to escape the sulfur and fire that came on Lot's generation.

We all deserve God's fearful wrath because we have rebelled against Him even though we are creatures that belong to Him, are accountable to Him. We have lived for ourselves, for our own glory, for our own selfish pleasures, instead of living for God.

[33 : 17] Someone must pay the price. And God, out of His love for us, sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross so that we who believe in Him might be forgiven of our sins.

might be received as good subjects, citizens in good standing of the kingdom of God. And as people who have experienced that mercy and grace, that's how we live now without seeking to preserve our own lives.

We live to lose our lives for the sake of Christ with awareness and anticipation for the kingdom of God.